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IF RELIGION IS LIFE, WHAT IS THE “SABBATH”?

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The question which the title of this article raises is unusual. It opens up a topic about which many feel intensely, but the issue which is here raised is not between the observance of the first and the seventh day, but rather the whole question of the observance of one sacred day in the week. This line of argument ought to appeal especially to men whose views of Sunday observance or Sabbath observance are latitudinarian. Perhaps it will also help those of our readers who are more sensitive to the legalistic elements which have worked their way into our religious life.

The first day of the week is in an anomalous position. For some it is an opportunity for physical rest; for certain people it rolls in with the weekly stint of church-going; for a few it suggests the cultivation of the inner life; for a considerable number its glorious outstanding characteristic is that it is the only day of the week that contains nothing in particular. The people who think that this position of the first day is precarious add to the ordinary week-day proscriptions against gambling or liquor-selling special ones for the “Sabbath.” So they place the ban upon excursions or baseball or moving-picture theaters. In place of these they would substitute the venerable practices by which men have been accustomed to express their religious life—church worship, Bible-study, meditation in solitude, and similar disciplines. Their “infidel” foes, who are indifferent to, or ridicule, religion as such, make no organized attempt to spread abroad a different and freer conception of the “Sabbath”; but when one scrutinizes the “Sabbath” life of such he is likely to find that the

chief element which it contains for them is *not working*. For work they substitute some form of pleasure; generally, I think, wholesome and recreative. Probably very few who have a personal conviction or special practice with regard to the “Sabbath” realize that it is indicative of their view of religion. “Sabbath observance” is no isolated question. It involves one’s conception of religion. What religion is, is vital to a final definition of the “Sabbath.” But the question which has interested me, and which seems important in certain circles today, is: “If religion is life, what is the ‘Sabbath’?” Given this view of religion—which is widespread—what bearing does it have upon Sabbatarianism? And this very idea of religion as life we see postulated in the lives of many who, in the technical sense, do not call themselves “religious.”

Probably many of us find among our friends people who do not make the sharp differentiation between God and man, between religion and life, between the material and the spiritual, which was formerly held and considered to be vital to

religion. Possibly some of us resemble our friends in this. We speak of an "immanent" God. As "immanent" we are experiencing him in the same way that we know our friends. Although the difference between us and our friends, their superiority over us, adds a certain awe to the relationship, the basic qualities which originally effected the friendship are the ones we hold in common with our friends. In some mutual interest, in a sudden flash of personality which coincides with a hitherto unexpressed impulse or aspiration of our own life, in co-operation on a plan of campaign—in these ways we pass from strangership to acquaintanceship and then to friendship. In spite of the attraction of unlikeness, there must be some similarity. The unlikeness must be likable, at least. So with our relation to God. We are interested in him because of his kinship with us. We do not wish to eliminate the other; we simply are not interested in it. Not God's deity, but his love; not his infinity, but his humanity, are what make our religious experience valuable. Then, too, we do find God *at all times* and *in everything*. The reason is because we look for *him*, rather than simply listen for the sound of his name. Where God is invoked, there he generally is—we hope. But where love is, there God is—and no mistake. So when, on the street, in the papers, in friendship, we see love triumphing over hate, there the heart swells in response and involuntarily bursts into the cry, "O God, I see Thee!" This partly accounts for the fact that today there are people who are deeply religious, yet not admittedly theistic.

When I ask the question which forms the title of this paper I am thinking of this type of people—people who really believe that religion is life. They do not think of religious experience as another form of experience different from the experiences of hourly life, but as the essence of it all. For them religious experience is experience in which one's socialized purposes, emotions, and ideas are operative, experience in which the idealistic and aspirational tendencies are stressed. They find exaltation, love, a challenge to service, in everything. The interruption of an interesting magazine article by the little child who wishes to exhibit his cake of mud, by its implicit faith in one's sympathetic observation, engenders in the religious man a reciprocal love, and stimulates his faith in the creative possibility of the child. To the irreligious man this interruption is only an importunate and inexcusable violation of the hoary convention that a child should be seen and not heard. The reader's impression of a newspaper account of a heroic deed brands him an infidel or a theist: if he is the former, the story is a thrilling spectacle; to the latter, it is a glorious symbol. Our fathers felt this God-spirit when they read the Bible, even in the pessimism of Ecclesiastes or in the imprecatory Psalms. Those today who believe that religion is life have the same sort of experience in reading poetry or a newspaper, in laying a large plan, in conversing with friends. They do not say they know God, for they do not know that they know him—they have secured their experience in a way so different from that of their fathers. But when we compare the two sorts of experiences,

correcting the individuals' diverse testimonies to them by the kindred results, we find them so similar as to be led to the belief that they are the same. At a chautauqua it is "'Way Down South in Dixie'" which sends the audience into an ecstasy of enthusiasm. The "Marseillaise" would not touch them; but it does for the Frenchman what "'Way Down South in Dixie'" does for the chautauquan. Yet one could never confuse the two tunes.

The church has sometimes admitted, but rarely asserted, that religion is life. Religionists have used it as a catchphrase in the past, but mention to them the fact that a political convention is a part of life and they crawl in quickly and hasten to deny the debatable fact that a political convention has any points of similarity with a prayer-meeting. But others believe that it has, for they maintain still their original conviction that religion is life. By this they mean that religion is nothing less than life, that it is not different from life, in the sense of being separable from it. Where they meet and shake hands with the other point of view is to admit that for purposes of reasoning or worship it is necessary and possible to make a *distinction* between religion and life. They also admit that to conserve religion as an entity you have to admit a certain distinction between the political convention and the prayer-meeting, but hold that you make such a distinction temporarily—only to make the convention more like the prayer-meeting. Such difference as there is between religion and life is not like that between day and night, but between morning and afternoon. The light that pervades them

both is artificially divided by man into two units, for the sake of convenience. The belief that religion is life, as I have observed it (and experienced it), means that religion is the essence of all life; not in any esoteric sense, but in the way in which we say of our friends, "The secret of his success is his unceasing industry," or "The spirit of his life is his love for his fellow-men." Religion becomes the content of any action which gives it significance. In any action, whether that of entering a theater, meeting a friend, sending a check, or lamenting the loss of a child, the religious element is that factor in the action which makes it important, vital, of personal interest. The reason we distinguish this element as "religious" is that by bringing the "religious" to bear upon "life," life may be made in turn more religious. What we are after in our religion-distinguished-from-life is to produce religion-operative-in-life. Antithesis ministers to synthesis.

The practical application of this view of religion relates it to the Sunday problem. Prayer-meetings, Sunday services, and such are not ends in themselves. They are stated periods when, and methods by which, one recalls to his attention the spiritual element that is in his life all along, at every moment of time. When a child asks to do something that we "don't want him to do," our response is often instinctive, *according to our feelings*. In our rational and judicial moments we recognize that the answer should be given *with regard to the spiritual need of the child*. Now, the spirit of the child manifests itself in his acts. It cannot be taken out and treated and trained separately from

these. It is in our reaction to the request or the action of the child that we ennoble or debase his spirit. So it is necessary that the determinant in our response to him be our interest in his deepest ethical, spiritual (call it what you will!) welfare. So, for the time being, in church and ecclesiastical services we distinguish between life and religion, between body and spirit, between person and personality, and consider these latter as things in themselves. We hope that by making this distinction in thought and for worship we may lay up a store of interest in the deep and vital factors of our experience, so that when we return to the problem of the child, for instance, we shall be determined in our response to him, not by our feelings and personal inclination, but by an intelligent, forward-looking sympathy. And possibly, if he is requesting the privilege of sleeping under the trees, we shall be less moved by the "foolishness" of a boy always wanting to sleep out of doors at night than by a loving consideration of what that boy in particular needs to develop his adolescent manhood. So, as a result of our temporary distinction between religion and life we go along thinking, reading, working, trying in every situation confronting us to make the inner, vital, personal element the prominent and paramount one.

Of course the "Sabbath" is not a peculiarly Christian conception. It is Hebraic. With the Hebrews "holiness" meant "apartness." Consequently their Holy One was transcendent in what seems to us like a spatial sense, mediated to the people through the priestly and prophetic orders. The chief emphasis upon his

special day was "to keep it holy." But the Fourth Commandment states the method by which to preserve holiness, namely, to abstain from work. In accordance with this and with their underlying idea of holiness the Israelites stoned the man whom they caught gathering sticks on the "Sabbath." In varying form this spirit and attitude has persisted down to the present time, although it is illuminating to notice in passing that so great a church Father as Augustine writes, in his tract *On the Spirit and the Letter*: "Well, now, I should like to be told what there is in these ten commandments, except that on the observance of the Sabbath, which ought not to be kept by the Christian"; and later: "Well, then, is it owing to the one precept about the Sabbath-day, which is included among them, that the Decalogue is called 'the letter that killeth'?" I presume that in the minds of most of the Sabbatarians their "Sabbath" obligations are supposed to be a particularly *Christian* duty. Or, as a staunch Presbyterian serving-woman said to a friend of mine one Sunday morning when, caught at the end of a hard trip with only two pairs of trousers, he asked her whether she would request the cook to put an iron on the stove so that he could press out the extra pair for church: "Sir, I don't like to, for the cook is a Catholic; and she'll think, 'Why, those Protestants aren't any better than us—they don't keep Sunday either!'" It has seemed to me rather pitiful to hear people twist Jesus' words when he told the Sabbatarians of his day that not the "Sabbath" but man is lord. As the large number of sects in history have tried to enlist the teachings

of Jesus in behalf of their programs, it would be comforting to get Jesus' pronouncement against Sunday excursions! The little obstacle in the way is that Jesus' life and words do not lend themselves without manufacture to this view. Our good Presbyterian forbears took Calvin as their guide in most matters of the faith, but when they edited his *Institutes* they were constrained to warn its readers against one flaw in his character—his failure to observe strictly the "Sabbath." Possibly they were thinking of the time when that rock-ribbed defender of the faith, John Knox, is reported to have visited Calvin and to have been horrified at finding him engaged on a Sunday afternoon in a game of bowls!

I wonder whether there is not a frequent and close connection between this idea of a "transcendent" God and Sabbatarianism. This idea of God stressed his difference from us; and the necessitated "holiness" of the "Sabbath" kept it thoroughly and rigidly separate from the other days. Later, the "transcendent" emphasis brought out the intellectual incomprehensibility of God. God was infinite, mysterious, inexplicable, and so forth—down through a long list of Latin words which thinkers, who had not learned the method of discovering new things in the external world, spun out with logical dexterity and aridness. Vital to the worship of many is the conviction that God passes imagination and understanding. But, aside from the latent mystery of existence itself, we deal with known quantities—clothes, food, work, friends—so that the emphasis upon the unknown, unknowable, and transcendent as the

distinctive element in God implies clearly a difference between God and the world, between religion and life. It justifies a program of six days during which one's activities may be what he wishes, provided they are moral, and a certain day upon which the previously proper activities become taboo and sinful. For if God be characterized by what makes him different from us, then his day must be differentiated from the other days.

What about Sunday in the lives of those who practice their belief in religion as life? It becomes a means to every other day. Not alone in the sense in which Sabbatarians have used it: if kept, a sort of magical guaranty of the happiness and success of the rest of the week. This view seemed to imply that Sunday was not only to be *distinguished* from the other days, but was to be *separated* from them in activity. At that time, by abstaining from tennis or sewing, by reading the Bible and "devotional" literature, one laid up a treasure of spirituality to last over to the next Sunday, when one stored up some more. If, however, we truly believe that religion is life, and have formulated the similarity and the distinction between the two, we have a basis for a new Sabbatarianism. Weeks and years are temporal expressions of life. Our experience falls into certain years, weeks, and days. The problem of Sunday versus the week days is the objective expression of one's philosophy of religion. According to one's idea of the relation between religion and life will his Sunday be related to his week days. If I believe that religion is different from life, then my Sunday must be different from the rest of the week. If I believe

that there is an inherent separation between religion and life, then I must carefully preserve Sunday from contact with the activities of the week. My ecclesiasticism is dependent upon my philosophy. But if I believe—and here we reach the gist of the matter—that religion and life are one, only to be distinguished from each other that we may worship and thus bring them together again, then Sunday is to be differentiated from the other days, not by being isolated from them, but by being distinguished from them. By making such a distinction we trust that less distinction will be necessary, that the activities of Sunday and of the weekdays may be more complexedly intertwined.

Nor is the pious soul justified in saying in sadness and alarm, "Why, this would do away with Sunday! We should become just like those infidel French! Sunday, church, God, character—all would be lost!" The man who would speak in this way has overlooked the salient point of the problem. As long as a distinction between religion and life is in any way necessary or useful we cannot do away with Sunday. The whole question hinges on the sort of distinction which we make between the two. Without being able to enter into a discussion of the matter here, it seems to me that an inductively conducted comparison of the two reveals very clearly the distinguishing mark of "religion." It is worship. In "life" a man is continually relating himself to his office, his practice, his finances, his friends, and other things. In worship man engages in a more or less conscious relationship with some invisible object, which he considers at least as powerful

as, and probably more powerful than, himself. Worship is the distinguishing mark of religion. Consequently, since we have selected worship as the characteristic by which we are justified for the time being in denoting the distinction between religion and life, on carrying that over into the Sunday question we naturally find that Sunday is fundamentally the day of worship. If worship is helpful to life in general, then Sunday has this very value for the week days. If worship is vital to life at large, then it is not only irreligious, it is folly, to think of doing away with Sunday. It would be akin to the method of the man who is so rabidly energetic that he proposes to banish sleep entirely, in order that he may have more time in which to work!

If, then, religion is life, what is the "Sabbath"? It is Sunday. It is to be classed still under a somewhat different heading from Monday, Tuesday, and the other days of the week. The fact of Sunday remains the same. But we must define it differently. It is the day of worship—not in the sense that no other day is one of worship, or that it is not possible or desirable to worship while one does the washing on Monday or the sweeping on Thursday, but it is the day of worship in the sense that men who worship have agreed that that is the time in which they will re-emphasize their belief in worship and mutually practice it in their lives, just as they rather generally agree that, sleep being a good thing, the night is the time they select for it. With artificial lighting systems they might as well sleep in the daytime. Some do.

People who spend their time saying that religion is life are often dilettante. They say it, not in order to secure more "religion," but in order to loll in an easier and more effortless "life." They talk about religion, not that they may have more of it, but to absolve themselves from it. They hope, by making religion and life synonymous, to be able to substitute "life," with its enjoyable golf tournaments, cocktail luncheons, woman's suffrage intoxication, or Shavian arguments, for the major injunction: Seek ye first the rule of Love. For them, or for their more intellectual relatives, the difference between religious and irreligious people is between those who can discuss the spiritual transformation of "Paracelsus" and criticize Bergson in the original tongue, with those who read the *New York American*, wear brown sox with black shoes, or eat unchap-eroned in a dairy lunch. For such thinkers, for whom thought is the toy rather than the tool of leisure, if religion is life then Sunday is a nonentity, a bore, or a carnival, as the case may be.

To the man who is passionately devoted to the personal values in life, Sunday is a wonderful season. It is the time when he reassures himself of the supremacy and goodness of personality. It is the time when he joins with other men—if he can find any!—in avowing this creed and expressing this faith. So, when the minister gives thanks for "this chosen and divinely appointed tabernacle of the Lord, in which we may bow before Thee, O Thou who sittest afar off in the heavens," at such a time he forgets the quaint and mediaeval terminology and feels that what the devout soul in the pulpit as well as the bending forms around him

mean, after all, is that life is something more than food and body than raiment.

Neither may such a man be afraid of a game of golf, or even of baseball, on Sunday. When he says that religion is life, he means business. He believes that religion is latent in all life, and he not merely assents to this fact in an intellectual way, he treats life as though it really were religious. Now, the difficulty with men who play golf on Sunday is, not that they play golf, but that they are not religious! The experience of theirs which is the nearest to worship is when they find without lengthy search the ball they sliced into the bush, or when they evoke divine assistance in speeding up the caddy. If they cared anything about personality, they might discover that their caddies would lose their jobs unless they consented to work seven days out of seven. But there are many who do worship; who feel in the exhilaration of a successful drive an expansive, ennobling emotion; who find in the disappointment of a poor play a depression of spirit which it is the glory of personality to conquer; who use the moments of walking from hole to hole to drink deeply of the air, vividly conscious that it is the insurging of the breath of God. They are men whose hearts thrill with a humble thankfulness for an afternoon with the God of green nature, and resolve that the activity of the afternoon shall lay up a reserve of moral energy to fortify their characters against the assaults of bricks and bonds and unbrotherliness.

It would seem to me that the man who is ardently and sincerely interested in all that deeper significance of life which he calls "religion" would be eager to join with others who have a

similar interest, although they may express it in very different ways and in language which it takes effort for him to understand. I should think he would wish to join in common worship—that is, if he were sincere, and did not claim a monopoly of the only way in which to state the underlying truth which he holds in agreement with the rest. Yet some prefer to go it alone. So when you ask the business man or his wife in their comfortable summer home why they don't go to church and show the countryside that they are interested in the communal activities of the people, they say, each in his or her way, "Why, I can worship in the woods—I don't believe one needs to go to church in order to worship." Can they worship in the woods? Certainly. Anyone with the worship-passion in his blood knows that. Do they? Well, I wonder. I did not need to wonder when I found one who had said this lying in a hammock slung between two giant pine trees, and reading—Robert W. Chambers! Does one stay away from the communal worship in order to worship better—let's be honest for once!—or in order not to have to worship? That is the question, isn't it? I hold no brief for the church. I believe in worship. If you stay away from church, saying that you don't need to go there to worship, can you be square with your soul unless you then and there worship? I can't. All my intellectual honesty and spiritual energy rises and with one voice calls to me: Worship! Worship here! And show those ecclesiastics you don't need their darksome temple! Down, down on your knees before God!

I cannot help sympathizing with the minister who announced not long ago to his summer congregation that he would guarantee to finish his service in an hour, so that the men could start around the links, provided they would attend the service—this, despite the fact that some sarcastic wag suggested that he locate the first tee directly outside the church vestibule! If religion is life, then it cannot be wrong to live on Sunday. The fault lies here—not in the thing one does, but in what one fails to do. The sacrilege is not in the golf or whatever other legitimate activity one chooses to engage in; *it is in failing to worship*. Worship distinguishes "religion" from "life." Worship, and communal worship particularly, distinguishes Sunday among the seven days of the week. The man who believes he is religious because he is loving and searching for the great, persistent, personal values of life, the man to whom the phrase "Religion is life" is neither the hollow formula of the dilettante nor the bromide of the religionist—ah, such a man will feel that the great desecration of the "Sabbath" is his failure to worship, his omission of the opportunity so to associate himself with his noblest ideal that it shall influence his life more pervasively and powerfully. The Sunday proscription of amusement, exercise, recreation! Many things we do not know—this one thing we do: the single purpose of the religious man is the sincere, complete, and unqualified subordination of all life to his one passion—to perpetuate by living example the incarnation. If religion is life, the "Sabbath" will become Sunday.